

Get Connected: Promoting Telephone Subscribership in Indian Country

Do you live on a federally-recognized Indian tribe's reservation, Pueblo, Colony, or former reservation in Oklahoma, Indian Allotment, or Alaska Native region established by the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act? Do you take part in federal or state low income support programs?

If so, you may be eligible for telephone hook-up and basic monthly telephone service discounts under the Lifeline Assistance and Link-Up America programs. The Lifeline Assistance program enables participants to receive basic monthly telephone service for as little as one dollar a month. The Link-Up America program provides qualified participants with a one-time initial hook-up discount.

Background

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) works to ensure that telecommunications services are available to "all the people" of the United States, including low-income consumers and those in rural, insular, and high-cost areas.

Because American Indian and Alaska Native communities, on average, have the lowest reported telephone subscribership levels in the country, the FCC has adopted enhanced programs, as part of the Universal Service Fund, to promote telecommunications subscribership and infrastructure deployment on tribal lands.

The Lifeline and Link-Up Enhanced Support for Tribal Lands

The Federal Universal Service Fund includes the Low-Income Program, which provides discounts on telephone installation and basic monthly service to qualifying consumers. There are two components to the Low-Income Program, Lifeline Assistance ("Lifeline") and Link-Up America ("Link-Up"). Lifeline and Link-Up are available to all qualifying low-income consumers nationwide. The FCC's **enhanced Lifeline and Link-Up** programs, however, which offer additional discounts, are available only for **qualifying consumers living on tribal lands**.

Lifeline provides certain discounts on monthly service for qualified telephone subscribers. These discounts vary from state to state, depending on whether your state has its own Lifeline program.

Enhanced Lifeline for Tribal Lands provides qualified consumers living on tribal lands with additional discounts on monthly basic telephone service. As a result, depending on current rates, eligible subscribers on tribal lands may receive basic local phone service for as little as \$1 a month.



Link-Up provides eligible consumers with discounts of up to 50% on initial installation fees, not to exceed \$30 per household. In other words, Link-Up gives a discount of up to \$30 of the first \$60 of the cost to initiate telephone service. For example, a \$40 installation fee will cost a Link-Up subscriber only \$20. Link-Up support also includes a deferred payment plan for these charges.

Enhanced Link-Up support for Tribal Lands provides qualified subscribers living on tribal lands with additional discounts of up to \$100 on initial connection charges. For example, an installation fee of \$130 will cost an enhanced Link-Up subscriber only \$30. The enhanced Link-Up program also includes a deferred payment plan for these charges. Lifeline and Link-Up discounts apply to the phone at the primary place of residence. This can be a wireline or wireless phone.

Lifeline also includes **Toll Limitation Service**, which enables a telephone subscriber to limit the amount of long distance calls that can be made from a phone.

Qualifying for Lifeline and Link-Up Support

The Lifeline and Link-Up programs are available to qualifying consumers in every state, territory, and commonwealth. Eligibility for participation in these programs varies by state. States that have their own state Lifeline program may have their own criteria. In states that rely solely on the Federal Low Income Program, the named subscriber must participate in one of the following programs: Medicaid, food stamps, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), federal housing assistance (Section 8), or Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP).

Qualifying for Enhanced Lifeline and Link-Up Support on Tribal Lands

A consumer living on tribal lands may be eligible for enhanced Lifeline and Link-Up if he/she participates in any of the five Lifeline programs, any of the four enhanced Lifeline programs, or any of the qualifying programs in his/her state (if the consumer lives in a state with its own program). The four qualifying enhanced Lifeline and Link-Up programs are: Bureau of Indian Affairs General Assistance, Tribally-Administered Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TTANF), Head Start (those meeting its income qualifying standard), or the National School Lunch Program's Free Lunch Program.

You should contact your local telephone company or your state regulatory agency for information about these programs to determine whether you qualify for discounts under the Lifeline and Link-Up programs. The telephone number for your state regulatory agency can be found on the Web site of the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners: www.naruc.org. State qualifying information is also available on the Universal Service Administrative Company's (USAC) Web site, www.lifelinesupport.org, in your local phone directory, or you can call USAC toll free at 1-888-641-8722.



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